

**Amendments to the Claims:**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

**Listing of Claims:**

Claim 1 (currently amended): An apparatus for the conversion of mercaptans comprising:

- a reactor vessel comprising:
- a first end and a second end;
- at least one inlet for delivering a feed including hydrocarbons containing mercaptans, oxygen and aqueous alkaline solution to said reactor vessel;
- a first end defining a reaction section and a second end of said reactor vessel defining a separation section and a fluid permeable shield extending across an entire lateral cross section of said reactor vessel, said shield for supporting a solid catalyst thereabove, a first side of said fluid permeable shield partially defining said reaction section and a second side of said fluid permeable shield partially defining said separation section;
- ~~a reaction section of said reactor vessel for accommodating a solid catalyst therein;~~
- a hydrocarbon outlet for withdrawing a sweetened hydrocarbon stream from said ~~separation section reactor vessel~~, said hydrocarbon outlet being positioned between said fluid permeable shield first end of said reactor vessel and said second end of said reactor vessel; and
- an aqueous alkaline outlet for withdrawing predominantly aqueous alkaline solution from said reactor vessel, said aqueous alkaline outlet being positioned closer to said second end than said hydrocarbon outlet;
- an outlet conduit in communication with said hydrocarbon outlet; and
- a residual alkaline removal unit in communication with said outlet conduit.

Claim 2 (canceled herein)

Claim 3 (original): The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said residual alkaline removal unit is a water wash column.

Claim 4 (currently amended): The apparatus of claim [[2]] 1 wherein all of said fluid passing from said reaction section to said separation section passes through a fluid permeable shield.

Claim 5 (original): The apparatus of claim 4 wherein said fluid permeable shield is positioned between said inlet and said second end of said vessel.

Claim 6 (original): The apparatus of claim 1 further comprising a drain pot vessel in communication with an aqueous alkaline outlet.

Claim 7 (original): The apparatus of claim 6 wherein an aqueous recycle line returns aqueous alkaline solution from said drain pot vessel back to said reactor vessel.

Claim 8 (original): The apparatus of claim 1 wherein said residual alkaline removal unit is a sand filter vessel.

Claim 9 (original): The apparatus of claim 1 further including a baffle between said inlet and said hydrocarbon outlet.

Claim 10 (original): The apparatus of claim 1 further including a collector protruding into said reactor vessel in communication with said hydrocarbon outlet.

Claim 11 (currently amended): A process for converting mercaptans comprising: mixing a hydrocarbon feed having an initial boiling point of at least 300°F

containing mercaptans with a catalyst promoter;

delivering said hydrocarbon feed and said catalyst promoter to a reaction section of a reactor vessel;

delivering an aqueous alkaline solution and oxygen to said reaction section;

contacting said hydrocarbon feed containing mercaptans with a bed of [[an]]

oxidation catalyst on a solid support to produce a hydrocarbon product with a

lower concentration of mercaptans than in said hydrocarbon feed, said bed of

catalyst being supported on a fluid permeable shield;

passing all of said hydrocarbon product and aqueous alkaline solution through [[a]]  
said fluid permeable shield to a separation section of said reactor vessel, said  
reaction section being disposed above said separation section and said shield  
extending across the entire lateral cross-section of the reactor vessel;  
generating an interface between said hydrocarbon product and said aqueous  
alkaline solution with a hydrocarbon side and an aqueous alkaline side of said  
interface;  
withdrawing hydrocarbon product from said hydrocarbon side of said interface; and  
withdrawing aqueous alkaline solution from said aqueous alkaline side of said  
interface.

Claim 12 (original): The process of claim 11 further comprising passing said  
hydrocarbon product to a residual alkaline removal unit.

Claim 13 (original): The process of claim 12 wherein said residual alkaline  
removal unit is a water wash column and further comprising adding water to said  
hydrocarbon product before it enters said water wash column to mix said hydrocarbon  
product and said water before entering said water wash column.

Claim 14 (original): The process of claim 11 wherein said catalyst promoter is a  
liquid.

Claim 15 (original): The process of claim 11 wherein said hydrocarbon feed, said  
oxygen, said catalyst promoter and said aqueous alkaline solution are all mixed together  
before entering said reactor vessel.

Claim 16 (original): The process of claim 11 further including subjecting said  
hydrocarbon product to a water wash without first undergoing settling.

Claim 17 (currently amended): A process for converting mercaptans comprising:  
contacting a hydrocarbon feed containing mercaptans and naphthenic acids with a  
first aqueous alkaline solution to convert said naphthenic acids to salts and  
remove said salts from said hydrocarbon feed;

delivering said hydrocarbon feed having a reduced concentration of naphthenic acid and a catalyst promoter to a reaction section of a reactor vessel;  
delivering a second aqueous alkaline solution and oxygen to said reaction section;  
contacting said hydrocarbon feed containing mercaptans and aqueous alkaline solution with a bed of [[an]] oxidation catalyst on a solid support in the presence of an aqueous alkaline solution to produce a hydrocarbon product with a lower concentration of mercaptans than in said hydrocarbon feed, said bed of catalyst being supported on a fluid permeable shield;  
passing all of said hydrocarbon product and said aqueous alkaline solution through [[a]] said fluid permeable shield to a separation section of said reactor vessel, said reaction section being disposed above said separation section and said shield extending across the entire lateral cross-section of the reactor vessel;  
generating an interface between said hydrocarbon product and said aqueous alkaline solution with a hydrocarbon side and an aqueous alkaline side of said interface;  
withdrawing hydrocarbon product from said hydrocarbon side of said interface; and  
withdrawing aqueous alkaline solution from said aqueous alkaline side of said interface.

Claim 18 (original): The process of claim 17 wherein at least one of said second aqueous alkaline solution and said catalyst promoter are continuously added to said reactor vessel.

Claim 19 (original): The process of claim 18 wherein at least one of said second aqueous alkaline solution and said catalyst promoter are continuously added to said hydrocarbon feed before delivery to said reactor vessel.

Claim 20 (currently amended): An apparatus for the conversion of mercaptans comprising:

a reactor vessel comprising

a first end defining a reaction section and a second end defining a separation section;

at least one inlet for delivering a feed including hydrocarbons containing mercaptans, oxygen and aqueous alkaline solution to said reaction section of said vessel;

a fluid permeable shield to support solid catalyst thereabove, a first side of said fluid permeable shield partially defining said reaction section and a second side of said fluid permeable shield partially defining said separation section;

a hydrocarbon outlet for withdrawing a predominantly hydrocarbon stream from said separation section of said vessel, said hydrocarbon outlet being positioned between said fluid permeable shield and said second end of said vessel; and

an aqueous alkaline outlet for withdrawing predominantly aqueous alkali from said separation section of said vessel, said aqueous alkaline outlet being positioned closer to said second end than said hydrocarbon outlet;

an outlet conduit in communication with said hydrocarbon outlet; and

a water wash column ~~residual alkali removal unit~~ in communication with said outlet conduit.